

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

SEPTEMBER 1983

ONE DOLLAR



VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

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Color separations by Lanman Dominion,
Richmond

Printing by the William Byrd Press,
Richmond

Virginia Wildlife (ISSN 0042 6792) is published monthly by the Education Division of the Virginia Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries, Box 11104, 4010 West Broad Street, Richmond, Virginia 23230-1104. Subscription rates: one year, \$5; three years, \$12.50. Submission guidelines for free lance work available upon request. The Commission accepts no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts, photographs, or artwork. Permission to reprint material from *Virginia Wildlife* is granted provided credit is given; clearance must also be obtained from the contributing writer and/or artist. Second class postage paid at Richmond, Virginia.

Observations, conclusions, and opinions expressed in *Virginia Wildlife* are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the members or staff of the Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries.

Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Related Natural Resources
Volume 44, Number 9

September 1983

Third Annual Special Hunting Issue

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Woodcock by Dennis Burkhardt, New Providence, Pennsylvania. Woodcock hunters can read Gerald Almy's advice for flushing timberdoodles without benefit of dogs, page 3.

Back cover: National Hunting and Fishing Day is September 24. Observances in Virginia are outlined on page 2a. Photos by (top, left to right) Frank Sargeant; T.G. Scott; Spike Knuth; (middle, left to right) R.C. Simpson; R.C. Simpson; Robin Schroeder; (bottom, left to right) Janet Shaffer; Curtis Badger; Archie Johnson.

Special Section

See Yourself As Others See You

Two major comparable studies have been done with the general public to determine their attitude toward hunters and hunting. The first was done in 1967; and the second, nearly 13 years later. As a part of each study, the general public was asked to select from a long list of adjectives those which they thought best described hunters.

Checking the latest study against the earlier one, hunters went down insignificantly as respecters of laws, stayed about the same in regard to being careful, went up a good bit in responsibility, lost ground as good sports and gained in friendliness. Hunters scored pretty high in all other favorable categories, too, but there was some disquieting news as well.

The unfavorable adjectives of tough, cruel, careless, inconsiderate and irresponsible were selected about twice as often in the latest study as in the one preceding. They weren't picked nearly as often as the favorable words, but there does seem to be a warning there.

Let's all take the time to re-examine our actions in the field. The public is watching and weighing what we do. To ensure years of hunting ahead of us, let's start with right now and make sure we do nothing to discredit the sport we all enjoy so much.

The National Shooting Sports Foundation offers a thoughtful folder, "The Ethical Hunter," for only 25 cents each or 100 for \$8.00. It offers food for thought for experienced and new shooters alike. Write NSSF, P.O. Box 1075, Riverside, Connecticut 06878. □

National Hunting and Fishing Day This Month

Each year, local groups get together to recognize the efforts and contributions that millions of hunters and fishermen have made to preserve the future of their sports.

In order to celebrate the collective interests of those who pursue the field sports, National Hunting and Fishing Day was organized.

The Virginia Game Commission in cooperation with the Izaak Walton

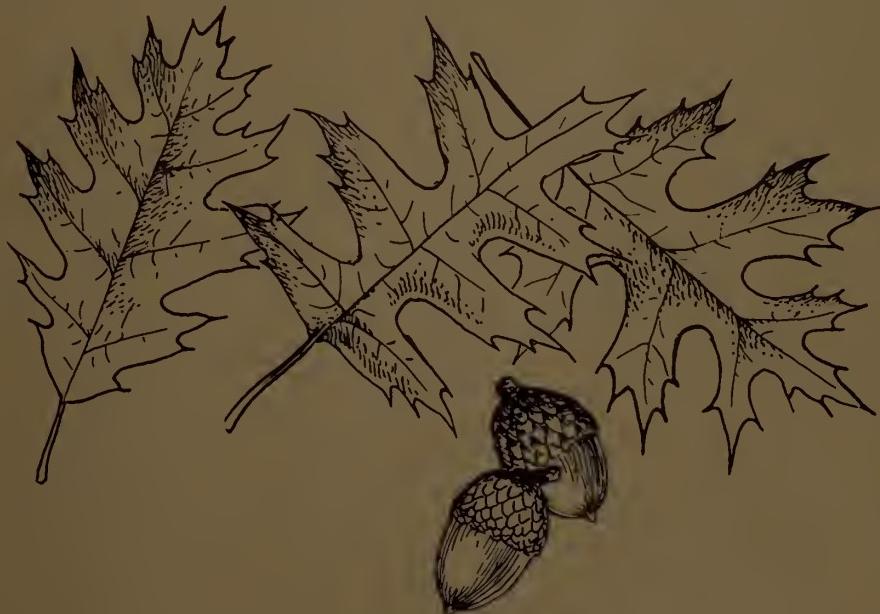
League has scheduled this year's program for Sunday, September 25. The events will include trained hunting dog demonstrations, various firearm activities, wildlife art, fishing activities and many other wildlife related events.

Izaak Walton Park is on route 60, 12 miles west of Richmond. Activities will run from 12 noon until 6:00 p.m. and admission is free.

Other local observances include:

- Portsmouth, September 25, contact Wendy Harder; 804/373-8481
- Lynchburg, September 24, contact Preston Bryant; 804/846-6822
- Charlottesville, September 24, contact Ed Rodger; 804/977-6555

Bring the family to enjoy the combined efforts and activities from the world of hunting and fishing. □



Migratory Game Bird Seasons

1983-84 VIRGINIA REGULATIONS

To be used as a supplement to SUMMARY OF VIRGINIA GAME LAWS, 1983-84 SEASON which contains additional information on license requirements, license fees and general regulations governing hunting in Virginia as well as open seasons and bag limits on non-migratory game birds, game animals and furbearing animals. For information on waterfowl, see separate digest A-12.

DOVE

SEASON: September 10 - November 5—Hunting permitted from 12 o'clock noon until sunset each day.
December 19 - December 31—Hunting permitted from one-half hour before sunrise until sunset each day.
BAG LIMIT: 12 per day, 24 in possession.

WOODCOCK

SEASON: November 7 - January 10.
BAG LIMIT: 5 per day, 10 in possession.*
HOURS: from one-half hour before sunrise until sunset each day.

SNIPE

SEASON: October 17 - January 31
BAG LIMIT: 8 per day, 16 in possession.
HOURS: From one-half hour before sunrise until sunset each day.

RAIL

SEASON: September 3 - November 11.
HOURS: From one-half hour before sunrise until sunset each day.
BAG LIMITS: A total of 15 clapper rails and king rails counted together a day, 30 in possession* and 25 sora and Virginia rails, counted together a day, 25 in possession.*

SPECIAL FALCONRY SEASON

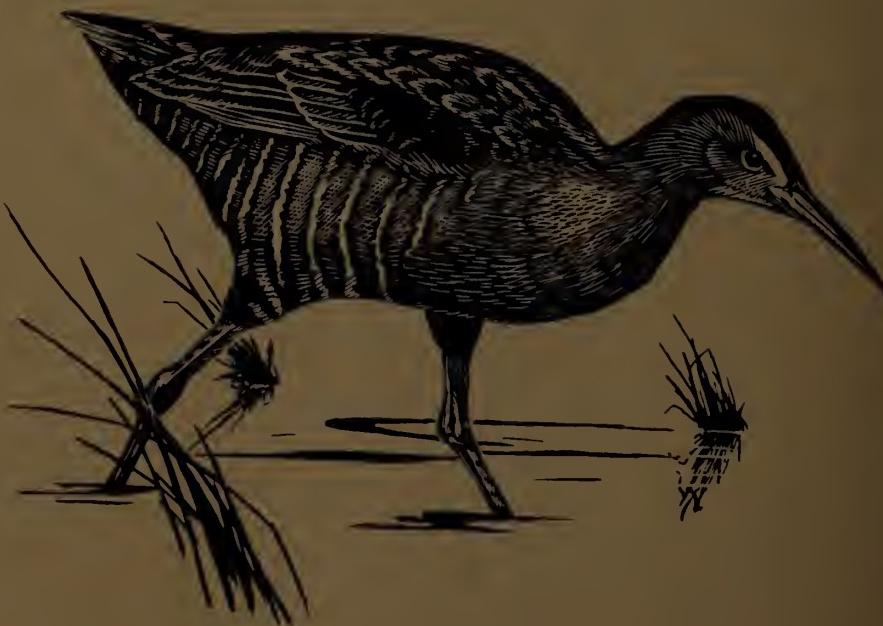
DOVE, WOODCOCK, RAIL

SEASON: September 20 - December 5, December 21 - 31.

SNIPE:

SEASON: October 17 - January 31
BAG LIMIT (all falconry): 3 per day, 6 in possession.*
HOURS (all falconry): From one-half hour before sunrise until sunset each day.

*Possession limits apply to transportation of game killed on more than one day



by Gerald Almy

Ready Set... Stop!

If you're hunting grouse or woodcock without a dog, try the "sudden pause" method to flush skittish gamebirds.

Even though it is two months 'til grouse and woodcock seasons open in Virginia, upland gamebird aficionados no doubt have visions of these elusive birds dancing in their heads.

But for those who take to the woods without the aid of pointing dogs, a day in the coverts can often yield more frustration than birds in the bag.

The reason is that dogless hunters typically walk right past more birds

Steve Maslowski



than they flush. There's a way to prevent this, though. I call it the stop-and-go technique, or the *sudden pause* approach to bird hunting.

It's a method of flushing and bagging birds that's easily learned and employed by a single person or pair of hunters pursuing either grouse, woodcock, or both. You should, in fact, come close to doubling your present success.

That's a bold claim. But stop-and-go hunting has done at least that for me and many other hunters I know. The reason for this drastic improvement is that the sharp, calculated pause in your progress as you work through cover not only increases the number of birds you put up, but it also moves the birds

"The sharp, calculated pause in your progress as you work through cover not only increases the number of birds you put up, but it also moves the birds when you are ready."

(most of the time) *when you are ready*. That means when you are expecting the flush. You have your gun half-mounted, and your feet firmly planted, and you're often looking in the right direction. You are, in short, anticipating the takeoff, rather than being taken by surprise.

I learned about this technique gradually, as I stumbled through the woods trying to teach myself how to bag these two elusive gamebirds without canine assistance. I'd read that the more ground you cover, the more grouse you'll move, so I set out to build up a pair of iron legs. I tramped the mountain ridges and draws until my weary legs felt like thin rubberbands barely able to support my leaden torso.

I moved a few birds, but usually they flushed when I wasn't ready. Or, they flushed late in the day, when my body was worn to a frazzle from the non-stop walking. In any event, my instincts were almost always too slow.

Steve Maslowski



Gradually a few experiences opened my eyes. Once I was wrapped up in a grapevine thicket trying to extricate myself when two grouse thundered out of cover 20 feet behind me—where I'd just walked a moment before.

Another time I worked through an abandoned orchard without moving a bird. But when I stopped to pour a cup of coffee, up flew a partridge.

In a marshy woodcock covert, I sank in over my boot tops one day and stopped to pour out the brown swamp water. That task accomplished, I picked up the scattergun and watched befuddled as a woodcock flushed not 10 feet in front of me. The bird had been sitting there all along.

Experiences such as those made me realize I was walking past quite a few birds. And when I stopped, they were flying. I tried a new approach, purposefully stopping in likely looking grouse and woodcock areas, waiting for a bird to fly.

My flush rate jumped dramatically. Furthermore, I finally began bagging some birds! Quite a few, actually, because I wasn't taken unaware, as was the case when I rushed headlong through the woods, mindlessly trying to cover as much ground as I could. These birds twittered or drummed out into the open when I was standing still, feet firmly planted, expecting their flush.

True, a grouse or woodcock didn't flush every time I stopped. And after 19 or 20 pauses, if no bird got up, it sometimes became difficult to fight back my old instincts to simply walk fast and try to cover more ground. But I persisted, and the sudden pause continued to improve my enjoyment and success in hunting both grouse and woodcock.

Upon reflection, it became clear just why the stop-and-go method was so telling. When you walk steadily through a forest or along a stream bottom, grouse and woodcock nearby know exactly where you are, and generally feel they can sit tight and rely on their camouflage for protection.

But when you stop, the quarry suddenly feels alarmed. It may think it has been spotted and now must flee or be caught. No doubt instincts associate that pause with the final hesitation that predators make when they sneak within pouncing range and make one final crouch before leaping onto their prey. The icy silence buckles the bird's confidence. Instincts tell the bird its best recourse is flight. The hunter has his flush.

The theory applies well to both

grouse and woodcock. If anything, timberdoodles usually sit even tighter than ruffed grouse. You can walk swiftly through a covert teeming with woodcock and only flush a few of them if you don't pause. A longer halt often is required, too. With grouse, the first 10 to 15 seconds move 90 percent of skulking birds. Reluctant woodcock squatters sometimes require a pause of 30 seconds or more before they'll fly.

The stop-and-go technique is easily learned, but it's *not* quite as simple as just stopping and waiting for birds to fly every 30 feet. There's a bit more to it than that.

Gerald Almy



The sudden pause is somewhat harder to apply at the start of the season, when foliage is heavy and cover plentiful. As leaves start to fall, and grouse become more concentrated in thickets, blowdowns, and grapevine tangles, reading the cover and calculating where to pause become easier.

For grouse, I like to work around knolls, paralleling ridges and skirting the tops of hollows. I'll then backtrack on different territory than I covered going in. Woodcock are occasionally encountered along with the grouse, but more often the best stop-and-go sport for these birds takes place along marshy stream bottoms, spring seeps, and the edges of beaver ponds.

For woodcock, concentrate your pauses where you find splashings and bore holes. For grouse, hesitate in areas that offer favored foods and good cover. If you've hunted the territory before, you should be able to predict, to a certain extent, where a bird might erupt.

Of course, it's never possible to totally predict where the birds will be, so a great deal of patience and discipline are necessary. The temptation is to skirt the edge of the cover or trudge up the middle and then be off to the next patch. Resist that urge! Work around and through every bit of cover. Many birds won't flush unless you come within 15 feet of them—and stop that close to them.

It's also important to try to predict where birds might fly. Where is the next good patch of cover they might head for? What obstruction will block your shot from different pausing positions?

Consider these things as you work carefully through the cover, then try to pick a "hesitation point" where you'll have room to swing the gun freely and see fairly well in the direction you anticipate the bird flying. Even if grapevines and briars are clutching at you, keep moving. Chances are that if you stop to pull off the stickers, a bird will erupt at just such an unpropitious moment.

For tight-sitting woodcock, I may pause every 30 feet. In more open grouse covers, it's sometimes best to walk 100 feet or more between pauses. As you get ready to stop, key yourself for the flush, since many birds will take off just seconds after you pause.

If cover looks excellent, but no bird flushes after 20 or 30 seconds, I sometimes slap the gunstock or take another step or two, then stop again. Some of these critters are so sneaky they'll wait until you resume walking before bursting out. This approach will often outfox them.

Two hunters can use the stop-and-go technique effectively, particularly if they travel at about the same pace and know the hunting area. When two are hunting, mix up the pauses so that sometimes one person is moving while the other is still and sometimes both hunters are immobile. Wearing some hunter-orange clothing and sticking close enough to keep sight of each other works best when two people are employing the method.

Of course, a grouse won't thunder from the brush and a woodcock won't whistle out of the alders every time you pause. But if you can school yourself to believe that one could be ready to fly every time you pause, you'll be ready and waiting when it does.

And that calculated pause, coupled with the preparedness it allows, can be the key to many delightful days in the grouse and woodcock coverts when there's no dog along to point the way. □

by Lt. Herb Foster

Make SAFETY Your Target

Here's how to improve the odds against your being involved in a hunting accident.

Imagine you have accidentally killed someone with a firearm. Imagine it's someone you know, someone close to you. It sounds incomprehensible, but year after year, it happens: someone gets careless, if only for an instant, and people are killed or physically maimed for life. No doubt the shooter is maimed, as well—emotionally.

A boy kills his father, one friend accidentally shoots another, a stranger dies as a result of a shooter's tragic error in judgement. How do we prevent these tragedies? How can you avoid injuring or killing someone? How can you avoid being the victim of someone else's carelessness?

For starters, learn from the mistakes of others. One reason we investigate hunting accidents is to learn what caused them so we can teach people how to avoid them. I have investigated hunting accidents for 12 years, in the field and behind a desk. I have learned that most accidents are the result of carelessness.

That's a deceptively simple answer to the problem of hunting accidents: *be careful*. But here's an example of what I mean.

Not long ago I learned that one of my hunter safety class students died of a self-inflicted shotgun blast. This occurred less than a month after he sat in my class. He mishandled the shotgun by the muzzle, breaking one of the cardinal rules of gun safety set forth in the class. Why didn't he follow those rules? As important as *learning* the



Virginia Game Commission photos

Remembering key points prevents tragedy: (top to bottom) always unload guns before crossing obstacles such as fences, ditches or streams; keep guns unloaded and cased when transporting; always keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction.



(Top photo) A leading cause of hunting accidents is swinging on game and exceeding a safe zone of fire. Careful planning of the hunt, and establishing each hunter's zone of fire will prevent such accidents. (Bottom photo) Always be sure of your target and beyond; failure to observe this rule is another leading cause of hunting accidents in Virginia.

"Ten Commandments of Gun Safety" is practicing them, every single minute you are in the field. Perhaps you know the Ten Commandments of Gun Safety; even if you do, read them again—they bear repeating, over and over.

1. Treat every gun as if it were loaded, at all times.
2. Always point the muzzle in a safe direction.
3. Unload guns when not in use.
4. Be sure the barrel is clear of obstructions.
5. Be sure of your target. . .and beyond.
6. Never point a gun at anything you do not want to shoot.
7. Never climb a tree or cross a fence or jump a ditch with a loaded gun.
8. Never shoot at a flat hard surface or the surface of water.
9. Store guns and ammunition separately.
10. Do not drink and handle firearms.

Following these 10 rules to the letter will greatly reduce your chance of being involved in an accident. When the rules are broken, accidents occur. Hunting statistics collected over the last four years show 291 hunting accidents reported of which 49 were fatalities. Of those fatalities, 41 percent (20) were the result of the victim being mistaken for game. Eighty-five injuries resulted from the same thing. This is the leading cause of hunting accidents.

Two years ago, an 11-year-old boy was shot by a 29-year-old man who mistook him for a turkey. The youth was sitting with his back against a small pine tree, practicing with a turkey caller. The other hunter—50 to 100 yards away—heard the turkey call, looked through his 3X scope and pulled the trigger. The aim of the .30-06 caliber rifle was true. The man had no notion that his target was a human being until he heard the boy scream.

The bullet entered the victim's left shoulder, causing massive tissue damage and breaking three ribs. The boy was taken to the Medical College of Virginia hospital in Richmond and lived, but his life has been affected permanently.

Too many of us think of non-fatal gunshot wounds the way they are portrayed in westerns. A larger-than-life figure such as John Wayne or "Marshall Dillon" gets plugged in the shoulder and is back in the saddle in a day or two. Real life is not like that. Rehabilitation from the simplest wound can be lengthy and painful. Disfigurement can last a lifetime.

Always be sure of your target. Do not let the excitement of the moment and your desire to bag game override your better judgement. If even the slightest doubt exists about your target, *do not shoot.*

The second leading cause of hunting accidents in Virginia during the last four years is the victim being out of sight of the shooter. Again, remember the rule, *always be sure of your target and beyond.* Preparation is an important element of following this rule, and an important part of a safe and successful hunt. Know the limitations of your

firearm, the location of hunting companions and the area in which you are hunting. These things can be accomplished only through thorough planning, scouting and research. Do you know the maximum range of your rifle or shotgun? The maximum range for 12-gauge 00 buckshot is 1,895 feet, or a little over 630 yards at sea level; this range increases at greater elevations. A 12-gauge one-ounce shotgun slug can travel up to 3,780 feet, or 1,260 yards at sea level. If you do not know how far your firearm can shoot, you increase the chances that you will hit someone out of your sight. Learn your firearm's limitations and plan the placement of hunters on stands accordingly. Never shoot over the crest of a hill; there is no way you can see what is on the other side.

Shooters hitting victims while swinging on game caused the third highest number of accidents (21) in the statistics. Fortunately, none of these accidents resulted in death. Most of these shooters were hunting small game and using lower powered shells which may explain the absence of fatalities in this category. Still, some were hunting deer or turkey; good luck may be the only thing that prevented fatalities in those cases. Be aware of the locations of your fellow hunters, and establish a zone of fire in which you will limit your shots. If you do not, accidents such as these can occur very easily.

You've read the ten commandments and practice them faithfully. You are conscientious about avoiding self-inflicted injury or causing injury to others. But what about protecting yourself from other hunters who may not be as careful as you are?

I have a few suggestions based on 12 years' experience as a Virginia game warden.

First, *make yourself visible.* Wear a blaze orange hat, coat, pants, gloves and underwear. The use of blaze orange has proven its worth in other states and countries. It does reduce the chances of your being shot accidentally.

Most of the fatal hunting accidents which occurred during the past four years happened when people were hunting deer or turkey. The first two weeks of the deer season, Saturdays, holidays and doe season are the times during which we see the greatest hunting pressure. More people are in the woods and the chances of accidents increase. Public lands draw large numbers of hunters, so perhaps you should increase your efforts to find a tract of private land on which to hunt (with permission, of course).

Always plan the hunt with your companions. Establish locations and do not move unless it is absolutely necessary and then only after making your move well known to all around you.

You might try elevated stands. A hunter standing on the ground and shooting in your direction will probably miss you if you are in a tree stand.

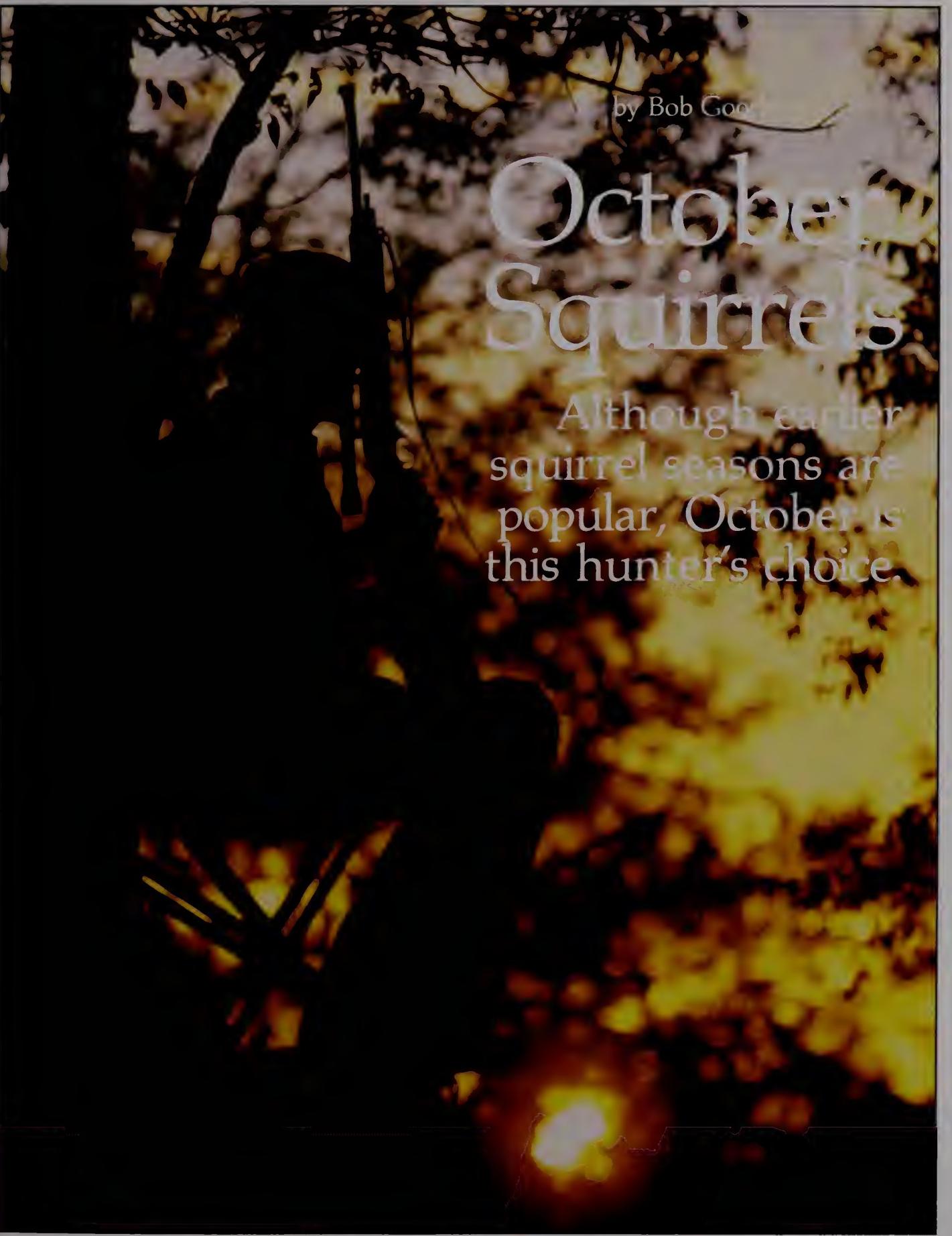
Of course, you must be especially cautious in your use of tree stands, which present their own set of hazards.

If all hunting partners are using tree stands, all shots should go into the ground in a relatively short distance.

LIMIT your companions to those you know to be safety conscious. If you do hunt with someone who turns out to be careless, don't hunt with him again.

These points only skim the surface. We'd like to see you enrolled in one of our hunter safety courses this fall: contact your local game warden or the Commission safety officer at the Richmond headquarters (Box 11104, Richmond, Virginia 23230-1104, 804/257-1000).

I wish you a successful—and safe—hunting season. □



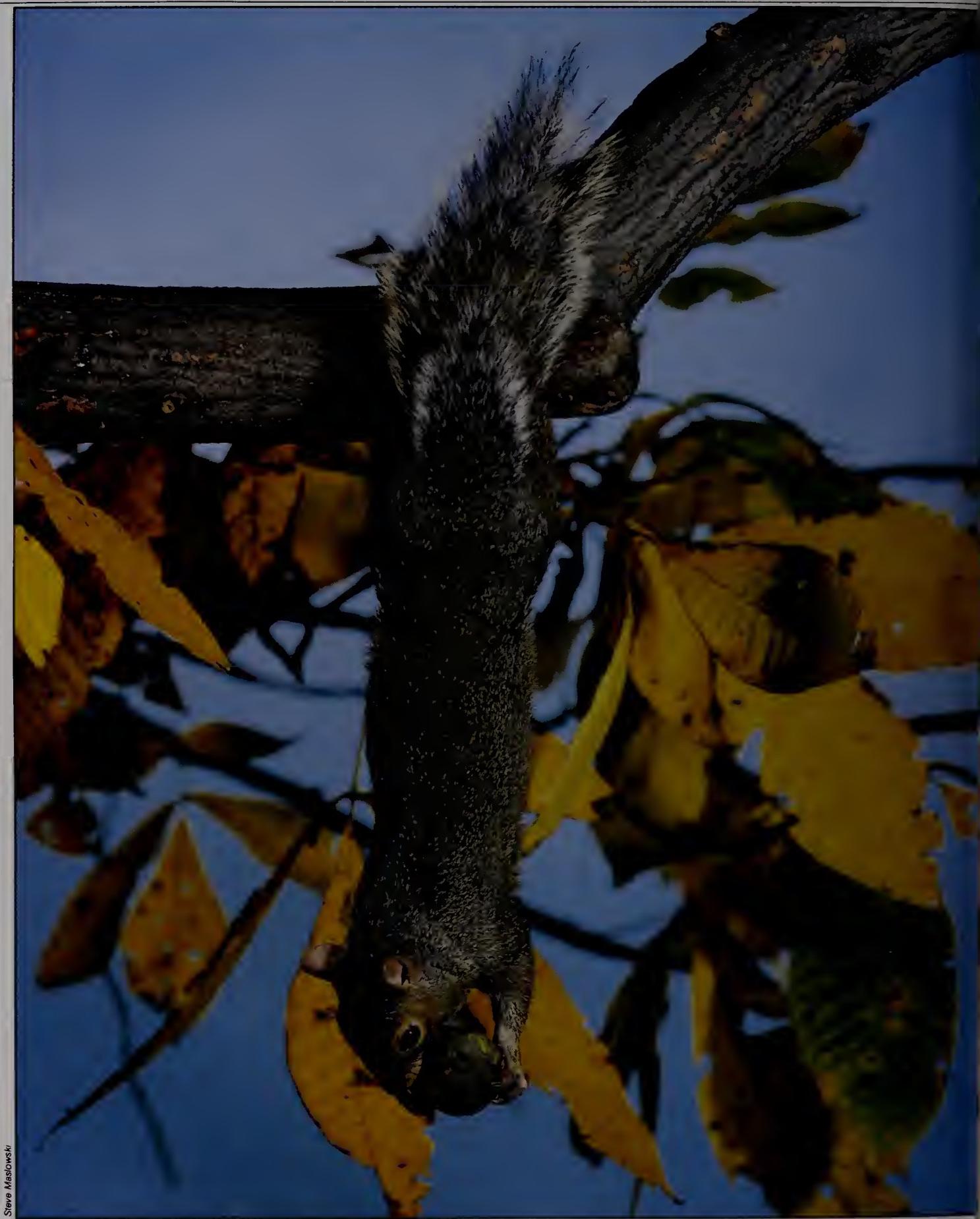
A close-up photograph showing squirrel tracks on a dark, textured surface, likely a tree trunk. The background is filled with fallen autumn leaves in shades of yellow, orange, and brown.

by Bob Goo

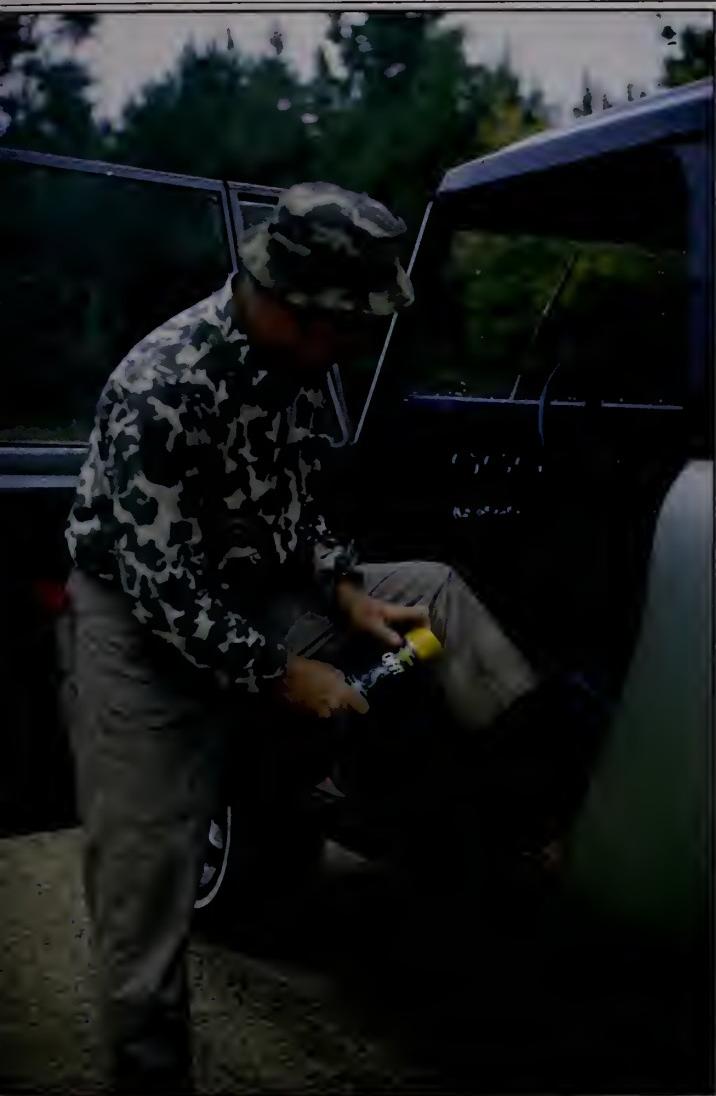
October Squirrels

Although earlier squirrel seasons are popular, October is this hunter's choice.

Richard Simms, TWRA



Steve Maslowski



Bob Gooch

"In looking at other states with longer gray squirrel hunting traditions we have learned that squirrels are more vulnerable to the gun before leaf fall," said Ben Tullar of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

The Old Dominion is one of those states with a long tradition of squirrel hunting, possibly the longest in the nation. And you don't have to tell Virginia's old-timers that squirrel hunting is good before the foliage falls. They have known it for years.

New York, incidentally, will hold a September squirrel season this year—possibly the first ever. It will be an experimental one, but if those New Yorkers take to squirrel hunting like our Virginia hunters do it is likely to become a permanent one. The squirrel is the number one game animal in Virginia, and its popularity never wavers.

Virginia's old-timers can also tell you that the major reason squirrels are vulnerable before the leaves fall is that it is then that they gather in nut-bearing hardwoods. It's "cutting time" and there is no surer way to bag a mess of squirrels than taking a pre-dawn stand near a nut-laden hickory. A good hunter can often limit out between legal opening time a half-hour before sunrise and breakfast. The fact that squirrels are near their annual peak of abundance also helps.

As a youngster growing up in rural Virginia I learned some valuable lessons in those hickory groves, and bagged a lot of bushytails, chiggers, ticks, and mosquito bites. September squirrel hunting was legal just about statewide then, and about the only thing for a country lad to do in late summer was fish or hunt squirrels—or go to school. Dove hunting was just about unheard of. I am not sure

(Opposite page) Earlier hunting seasons take advantage of "cutting time," when the squirrels are gathering in nut-bearing hardwoods, such as this gray squirrel. (Left) A feature of early squirrel seasons is the presence of chiggers, ticks and mosquitoes; be prepared! (Below) A fox squirrel heads for its nest.



Karl Maslowski

there was a dove season, and the eastern rail marshes might as well have been across the United States.

A couple of fruitless dawns taught me that a good hunt was dependent upon locating a good tree the day before. That was easy as the ground beneath it would be littered with nut fragments. I also learned the importance of being on my stand well before dawn, and I suspect I was often too early.

I hunted with a little .22 caliber single-shot rifle and open sights, and I missed often. If I did not move, however, the squirrel would usually hold for a second shot.

I also discovered that I could get my limit more quickly if I did not move in immediately to recover my game. A careless move by the hunter could be much more disturbing than shooting a whole box of .22 caliber ammunition. The answer was to watch the fallen squirrel to make sure it was dead, and then leave it to be retrieved at the end of the hunt.

The exact location of a stand became important—and not just for concealment. A rest for my rifle was preferable to shooting offhand. I learned to look for a convenient tree limb or a small sapling. I could rest the rifle in my hand or grasp the sapling and rest it across my forearm.

Chiggers and ticks were bad then and, I believe, just as bad or even worse today, though a couple of chilly nights would send most of them to wherever they spent the winter. And the first frost would eliminate them completely. Old-timers said you could expect the first frost by the 10th of October.

As a youngster I used to sprinkle kerosene on my boots and the bottoms of my trousers. It would smell for weeks, but did help deter the ticks. Fortunately, today there are numerous insect repellents that can be sprayed on your boots and trousers with good results. I also discovered I could reduce the risk of chiggers and ticks by staying off cattle and game trails and out of grassy areas. And rotting logs always seemed to host chiggers.

Stand hunting is so effective in late summer and early fall that I seldom considered any other method, but later in the day still-hunting can be interesting and a challenge. Partly because they are more abundant then, they are more obvious throughout the day. The cautious hunter who moves slowly through the woods and stops frequently to look and listen is almost sure to get some shooting. Since the game will usually be moving, a light shotgun is a better choice than a rifle.

That autumn foliage can be a blessing—and a curse. It offers excellent concealment. Locating a well-concealed stand near a hickory tree is much easier in the early fall when there is still plenty of foliage. On the other hand, the squirrels are also more difficult to spot. I have had them move about in a tree for 10 or 15 minutes before I could see them. Patience, however, will eventually pay off. Sooner or later one will present itself and you will get your chance.

I learned early that hunting was best when there was no breeze. Not a leaf stirred on such a morning, and a squirrel could not move without betraying its location. I couldn't always see my quarry, but the movement of the leaves told me he was there—and it was just a matter of biding my time. Birds often misled me initially, but I learned to distinguish between the two. Because of its weight, the movement of the squirrel is more pronounced.

I also learned to distinguish between the wind in the trees and the movement of a squirrel. The leaves moved vertically beneath the weight of a squirrel, whereas the movement of the wind was more horizontal—and more constant.

As squirrel may sit high in a tree for a long period without moving. Usually it is gnawing on a nut, and this can give it away. If your ears are sharp you may hear its teeth cutting the nut, but the steady fall of nut fragments is more likely to reveal its presence. They are not unlike the fall of raindrops as they sift down through the leafy branches.

Early squirrel seasons have long been controversial in the Old Dominion. Many hunters feel they come too early, and others fear those drawn to the woods to hunt squirrels will poach turkeys or other game. Poachers, however, are not bothered by the absence of an open season, and legitimate hunters are not going to shoot illegal game.

I personally have trouble with seasons that open in September, particularly early in the month. Fortunately, there are only a few left where the season opens September 1—Brunswick, Dinwiddie, Greensville, Lunenburg, and Southampton. They run for two weeks. Squirrel hunting begins September 15 throughout much of southwest Virginia, and early hunting is very popular in that part of the state. In the remainder of the state, there are either no early squirrel seasons, or they open October 1 to run for two weeks.

Wildlife biologists say that while there is some breeding activity throughout the year, squirrel reproduction is highest at two peaks, late winter and late summer. Winter hunting is over before the first breeding season, and October hunting interferes less with the late summer one.

Another advantage to beginning the season in October is that the problem of botflies is gone by then. In late summer, botflies or "wolves" sometimes infest squirrels. While they are not harmful to humans, they are unsightly and people tend to discard the meat, a waste of a valuable resource.

Game managers throughout much of the South agree that October is a biologically sound time to hunt squirrels, though many would prefer the latter part of the month. Both Fort A.P. Hill and Fort Pickett open their squirrel seasons October 15 to run through January 31, but the early season opens October 1 on the Quantico Marine Reservation to run for two weeks.

I'll take October squirrels, thank you. □

by Bill Cochran

The ELUSIVE



Mourning Dove

Don't be deceived by this bird's docile appearance—it's tough to bring down, so plan your hunt well.

(Above) The mourning dove is a worthy—and wary—adversary. (Top right) Camouflage is de rigueur for dove hunting.

Ever notice how doves suddenly throw aside their cute cuddling and cooing mannerisms to take on hawk-like characteristics when the hunting season opens?

It's really difficult to explain, particularly to your neighbor, who doesn't happen to be a hunter. Since last winter, these birds of peace have gathered around his feeding stations. They have been pert silhouettes in his walnut tree. They peer at him innocently through black, beady eyes made of polished coal. They waddle about on pink legs so stubby that each step must be accompanied by a bob of the head to keep them from falling on their faces. Occasionally, particularly if it happens to be a hot, humid day with thunderstorms in the offing, they will emit a mournful oo-ah-cooo-cooo-cooo.

Hunters watch the charade entranced, and with no little amusement. They well know that it is mourning doves one day and moaning hunters the next—when the season opens.

(Right) A partially harvested corn field will attract doves like a magnet. (Below) In Virginia, dove hunts typically occur on Indian summer-like days; keep your partner watered. (Bottom) Even if you are quick enough to bring down a dove, you've got to be sharp enough to find it on the ground; a retriever such as this Boykin spaniel can mean more doves.





(This page, bottom photo) Shooting doves is tricky: "you aim in such a way that your shot and the dove will arrive in the same spot at the same time." (Below) A fitting reward for the successful shooter—barbequed breasts of dove and wild rice.



Along about the first Saturday or two in September the masquerading ends. The dove suddenly adds another carburetor to its engine. It strips off its fenders and installs rollbars. No longer a sitting duck, it comes roaring across the landscape, sometimes arrow-straight like a SAM missile, sometimes twisting erratically like a Phil Neikro knuckle ball. Few things bring more fascination and frustration to mankind wearing camouflage.

You are likely to see doves almost anywhere. I once observed a pair in a pine tree after hiking half a day into an eastern wilderness area. Another time I watched in amazement as a dove swept low across Baltimore's Memorial Stadium just as an umpire brushed off home plate, and more than 40,000 Oriole and Yankee fans were screaming for blood.

Flourishing where other wildlife fails is a virtue of the dove. Dr. Patrick Scanlon of the Virginia Tech department of fisheries and wildlife sciences tells me it is easier to trap doves for research purposes on a busy college campus than in the hinterlands. Several years ago, when the Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries was conducting an extensive dove banding project in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, one of the most productive spots to collect birds was around Roanoke's busy municipal airport. Such domestication helps explain why frequently I must brake and swerve my car to avoid hitting doves when I drive through my urban neighborhood, particularly near one intersection that is a favorite grit-picking spot. This is where, each year, the sharp beaks of the birds pick a pothole in the pavement. The city workers come along and patch it, only to have it reopened a couple of months later. It takes considerable grit to satisfy the digestive system of the doves, something, perhaps, the city fathers would do well to remember at budget time.

The best place to locate birds come opening day is neither wilderness nor urban areas, but agricultural fields. In the western part of the state where I live, a freshly-harvested cornfield is a favorite arena for a hunt, where weed-bearing plants have been exposed and shattered and where grains of corn lie glittering in the bright sun.

Unfortunately, during most years, such fields are at a premium, because the weather is either too wet or too dry or too something for the season's opening to mesh with corn harvesting time in just the precise way hunters prefer. So you do some serious preseason scouting.

I'm always surprised that some of the same hunters who will exert considerable effort scouting places to find the wily deer and turkey never give consideration to doing likewise for doves. The owner of the field I hunted opening day last season was besieged by a steady string of people looking for a place to hunt the last hour before the season began. He turned them away because he'd lined up his quota of gunners two weeks before.

Actually, the hunting part of dove hunting best takes place a comfortable distance before the season begins. The trick is to ride the agricultural backroads looking for concentrations of birds. Most likely they will be found around cornfields, commercial vegetable gardens, old orchards, small-grain fields, foxtail and pokeweed patches and watering holes. That's how it is in my area.

Once you locate concentrations of birds, the next step is to gain permission to hunt them. This, too, is a preseason task. It can take some skillful public relations, but when you've gained a landowner's confidence through acts of proper sportsmanship, you can expect to be welcomed back season after season.

One vegetable patch I hunt is owned by an old-timer who takes great delight in seeing hunters enjoy themselves. On a hot day, he'll visit each stand with a water bucket. Last year, when doves weren't flying so well, he actually apologized, as if it were his fault.

If you've done your homework, then opening day isn't a matter of hunting, it's a matter of gunning. While I have become rather adept at recognizing a good dove field and even gaining permission to hunt it, I have not yet entirely accomplished the knack of hitting doves with consistency. The idea is simple enough: You aim in such a way that your shot and the dove will arrive in the same spot at the same time. That sounds easy enough, but somehow I've never been able to shoot as well as I know how. I explained the

fundamentals to my son when he was just a youngster, and the next day he was wiping my eye. I've never completely gotten the hang of it myself. Nor have many other hunters, much to the delight of the ammunition manufacturers.

One opening day Game Warden Lt. John Heslep and I watched a dove fly the length of a heavily-hunted field and survive 12 or 15 shots along the way. The bird then turned and zipped purposefully back across the same field, amid even more shots and shouts. As it soared over the head of one hunter, Heslep and I overheard the hunters say, "That's the same blame bird I missed just 20 seconds ago. I'm not going to waste another shell on him." The dove flew out of sight without a feather ruffled.

I've been in enough dove fields on opening day to realize that some hunters believe the best way to bag a limit is to fill the air so full of shot that nothing can fly. Even that doesn't always work, and when you examine a dove close up you quickly can see why. Here is nature's perfect flying machine. His whistling wings are long and shaped like a scimitar. His tail is sharp, like a keenly-filed spear. His bulging brown breast is stuffed with energy, and when you peel the feathers from it you half-expect to find the big "S" of a Superman shirt.

Doves are smart, too. Ever notice when you shoot into a flock, often the birds will split up, one going that way, two the other, three more yonder? It is a survival technique. The passenger pigeon made the mistake of flying about in huge flocks and even nesting in large concentrations. Not the dove.

Fortunately, there are a few things you can do that will help you bag something more than just your eyes when you go after these artful dodgers. Before the season begins, you can pop a few shells at your local skeet range. That can help sharpen your shooting eye, even though doves seldom fly with the precision of a clay pigeon.

You can wear camouflage or drab clothing that blends well with the natural cover when you hunt. This will result in more shots at closer range, particularly if you use a fence row, clump of brush or tree to break up your outline even more. One of the best forms of camouflage I've found is simply to remain motionless as a dove approaches.

There is an art to selecting the best spot in a field to take a stand. Watch the flight patterns as the birds enter the field. An old snag tree, a piece of high ground, a depression can be the kind of thing that doves will home in on. Stay loose and be ready to swap locations. For me, sometimes a good plan is to carefully select a prime hunting position, then purposefully stride across to the other side of the field, because doves invariably have a way of flying where I'm not!

Even when you down a dove it has one last trick, and that is its ability to disappear the instant you take your eye off it. I believe this would happen even if you were hunting on a putting green. So keep an eye on every bird you drop and retrieve it immediately. Better yet, get yourself a retrieving dog. Our little Boykin spaniel means extra doves at the end of a hunt, and more fun during the hunt.

Since every dove hunting story should end with a tasty recipe, here's mine. The easiest way to prepare doves is to lift the breast out with your thumb and cut it free. The resulting chunk of meat is good fried, roasted, baked, stewed, pied or fixed most anyway you care to try. My favorite method is to bone the breast and cook the pieces on an outside hooded gas grill while basting them with generous amounts of barbecue sauce. Serve them on a platter with wild rice. It's a delightful way to climax a successful hunt. □



The Paintings of *Bill Bolin*

A Richmond biologist and waterfowl hunter depicts his favorite subjects in watercolor.





Oriental Park

Bill Bolin has been painting and drawing for as long as he can remember, but he has increased his efforts in recent years, owing to encouragement from his wife, Gail, and friends. The Richmond resident is a biologist for VEPCO and an avid duck hunter. He spends the winter months "collecting material for future paintings."

"Mrs. Lovett's Geraniums," one of the paintings published here, depicts an earthen pot of geraniums, and some decoys on the windowsill of a weathered old workshop. It was judged "Best in Show" among 309 entries at the 19th Annual Bath County Art Show in July 1982. Bill describes the work as a "labor of love," having spent a year planning it and six weeks painting it.

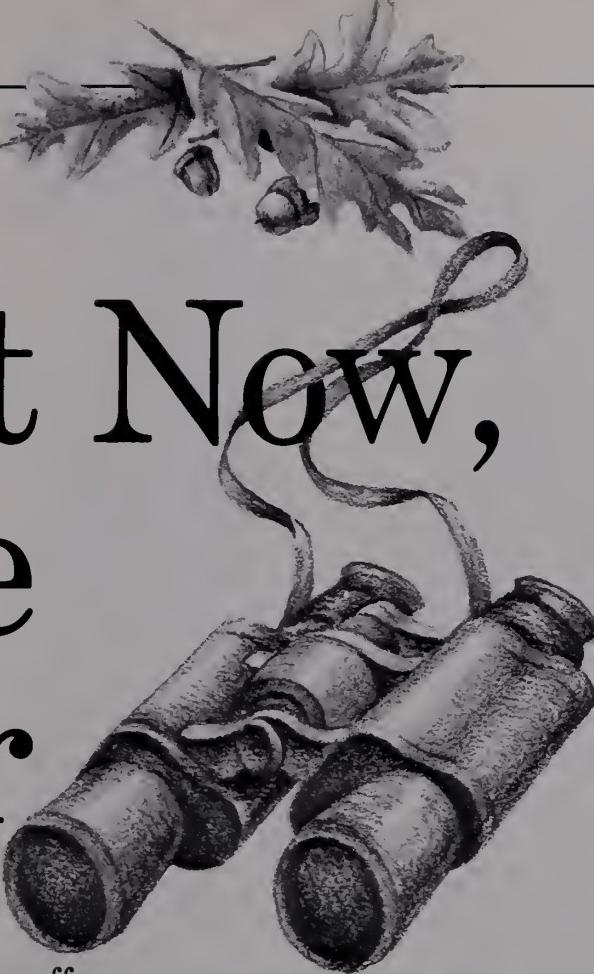
This self-taught artist uses what he describes as a "trial and error" method. His subject matter varies, including old buildings, pet portraits, wildflowers and wildlife. It is easy to recognize, however, that his first loves are waterfowl and old decoys.





Scout Now, Score Later

by Jack Randolph
illustrations by Phyllis Saroff



Scouting deer—or a particular deer—pays dividends for bowhunters and gun hunters alike.

Antlers were visible just over the blueberry bushes as the husky buck ambled up the trail towards me. I knew he was coming my way just as he had several mornings before the season opened. He was an eight-pointer, heavy of beam and corn fed plump. In seconds he would be mine.

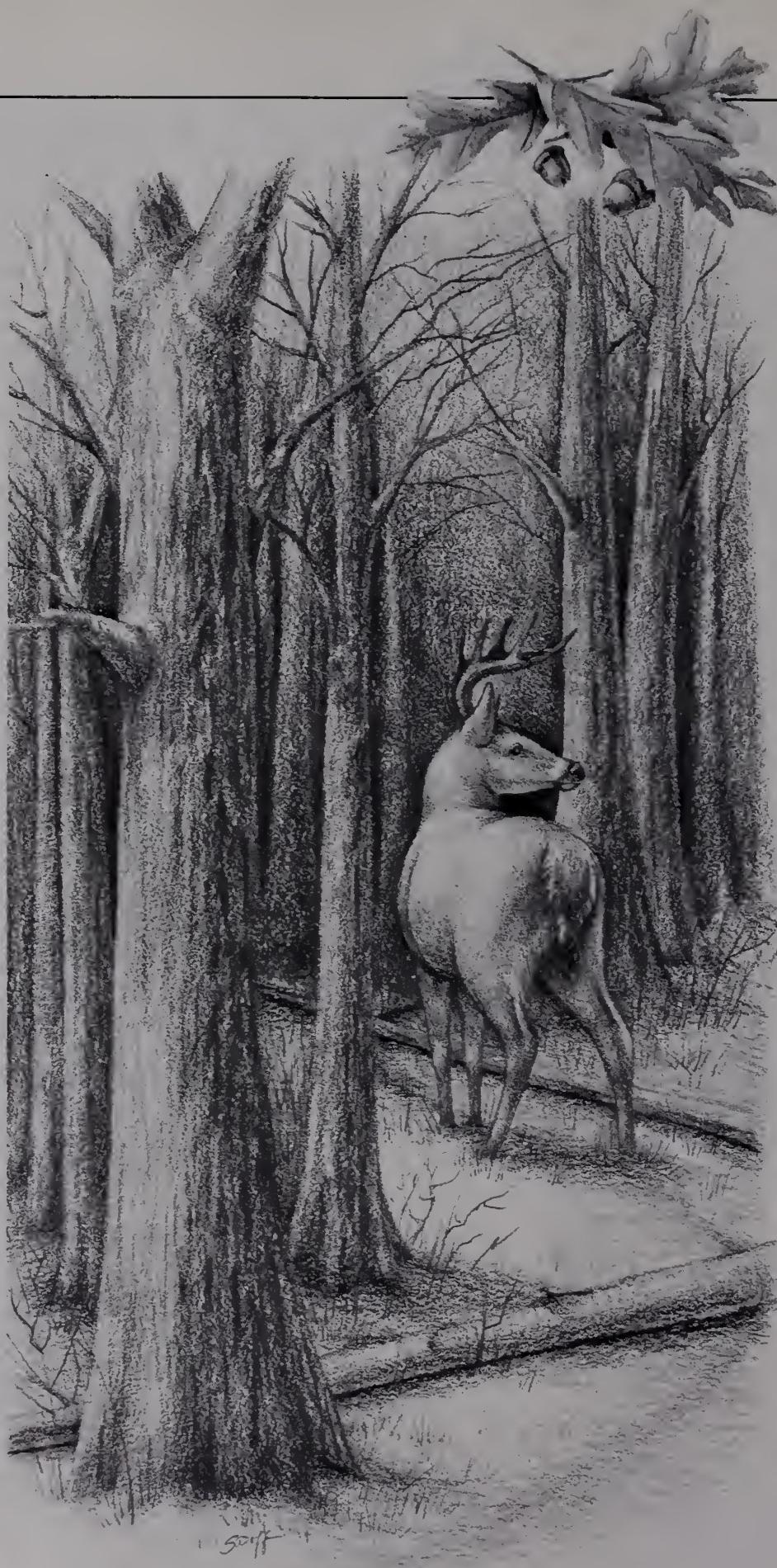
Then I heard it. The snap of a twig. The buck heard it, too. A flash of color caught my eye and a young hunter strode into view, clad all in red and carrying more knives than a circus knife thrower.

He had a knife in either boot and two on his belt, one on either side. He carried a gun, but I had the distinct impression he was out to stab the deer to death. So intrigued was I with his pretty fresh-from-Abercrombie & Fitch costume that I almost forgot that he had just cost me a big buck and several weeks' work. But he was a pretty thing, that young fella, a prime example of what the boys back home call a "Hollywood Hunter."

On the outside chance that the deer would use that path the following morning I grunted a muffled "good

morning" and departed, heading for a deer superhighway I had found, a place where deer on the move may travel.

This deer hunt actually started several weeks before the season opened. I had waited for the rut or mating season to start before I started looking for deer. The wait was deliberate. I wanted to give the deer a chance to establish patterns they were most apt to follow on the opening day of hunting season. There is an abrupt change in deer habits when the rut commences. Looking for deer too early discloses a lot of history. We want current events.



Scouting for deer can pay dividends during the season. However, such scouting means different things to different kinds of hunters.

Some folks start their hunt by scanning all of the available maps and statistics in an effort to determine the best deer area in the state. The most useful statistic in this regard is the number of antlered deer killed per square mile of deer range. If viewed in this light the hunter will soon discover that the county that records the most deer kills may not produce as many deer per square mile as another county with less deer range.

Once the most likely area is found the hunter may then attempt to secure permission to hunt somewhere in the vicinity. However, more often than not, the hunter already has located the areas on which he can hunt. His scouting effort is confined to that area and he is now trying to find the best prospects on the available land, or at least, to familiarize himself with deer movement on lands he has hunted before.

The rut in Virginia commences in early October and extends into early December. The peak occurs in mid-November. Bow hunters should start their scouting in late September while gun hunters can delay until late October.

Actually, the bow hunter usually has the best results from his scouting efforts. He is generally a still hunter among still hunters and there are no dogs and only a little human activity that can affect deer movement patterns. Gun hunters who prefer to still hunt their deer can benefit from pre-season scouting, but if they are hunting in dog running country or where there are a number of hunters in the woods, chances are deer movement patterns will be disrupted by the end of the first day.

There are two forms of pre-season scouting. One is scouting for deer and the other is scouting for a particular deer. The latter is more fun, but we are often forced into the former.

In heavily hunted areas pre-season scouting should be directed towards finding areas where there appear to be lots of deer. Well worn deer runs, buck scrapings on saplings, furrowed up leaves under oak trees, numerous deer droppings and actual sightings of deer are the usual signs. Such areas are good places to bring the dogs to jump a deer and vantage points near well used runs are excellent ambush sites.

Scouting out a trophy buck is more fun and often more rewarding. The presence of a big buck can be detected by numerous scrapings on trees and scrape marks, but the best clue is to find the buck himself.

Once sign is found look for feeding areas such as soy bean fields, oak groves or corn fields nearby. Make it a point to be near these fields, well hidden, at dawn or dusk. Carry field glasses so you can examine the animal. If he turns out to be as good as you think he is you can devote the rest of the pre-season to learning his ways as I learned the ways of the big buck at the opening of this story.

If the deer is in the habit of feeding in a certain area at night, he will probably return to the same general bedding areas during the day. It would be nice to follow the deer trails until you locate the bedding areas, but by walking through the woods several times you could disrupt the herd. It is probably better to locate the main trails leading away from the feeding area and select an ambush site along the way.

The spot you select should be one that's easily accessible without making too much noise. You may elect to place a tree stand at this point or you may prefer to remain on the ground. I like to pick out prominent trees near the stand and pace off distances so I have some idea how far the animal may be from me. This is important to bow hunters or shotgun hunters.

It is smart to have several alternate stands selected so you can position yourself downwind of the approaching animal. Many hunters meet their Waterloo by not considering scenting conditions.

Early morning hunting is emphasized because for the gun hunter the early morning on the first day may be all he can get before other hunters and dogs move in. Yet, it is true that deer will maintain their routine if they can. Returning to the same area in the late afternoon could be productive. How often have you started home just at dark to see deer all over the fields and roadsides?

Of course, the bow hunter and later, the muzzleloader hunter has far less competition. Once a good deer run or feeding area is located it is just a matter of time and luck before he has a shot.

If, after the first hours of opening day, you fail to connect, select a stand near some well used deer runs. Be patient and wait them out. Who knows? You might get lucky. □





*A pack of beagles,
a wily rabbit,
an ancient tradition:
it's called beagling.*

CRY OF THE HOUNDS

by Mary Taylor

photos by Francis N. Satterlee

The Fox Hill Beagles were invited to hunt at Barnstaple, a rolling picturesque farm in Goochland County. An Indian summer had penetrated the first week of December. The temperature was in the 70's, advantageous to the rabbit for the scent was quickly rising and not easily discernible to the hounds. We were warmly greeted by our host and hostess and promptly moved off at 3:00 p.m., down the lane, over a fence whose rail was lowered and replaced by the last member of the field. The magnificence of fall foliage was missing, but the unusual weather enfolded us in its warmth and gentleness. We were free to enjoy the beauty of the day. The manicured lawn disappeared behind us as we passed over pasture and headed for the thickets down by the creek bed. As we walked, members of the field and

their guests were introduced to one another. All were warmed by the sense of camaraderie in that field.

Our purpose was resolute, to participate in the ancient sport of beagling that preceded fox hunting and can trace its roots to the Plain of Marathon outside Athens as early as 400 B.C. Beagling is the art of hunting a rabbit in its natural habitat with a pack of small hounds. Rarely today are sportsmen mounted while participating. It is accomplished primarily on foot. One exception to this rule in Virginia may be found with the Wolver pack at Middleburg where huntsmen are mounted.

The hounds used today are swifter and smaller hunters. It may be said that they are a scaled-down version of the fox hound. They are deliberately bred to be slower than rabbits to preserve the fairness of the sport. Their ears are



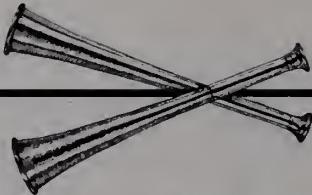
Unlike fox hunting in which huntsmen are mounted, beagling is often done on foot.

much larger and their heads are more rounded. There is an unmistakable twinkle in their eyes—the knowing glance that tells the keen observer of the merriment to follow. They are also bred for nose and endurance, gait, willingness and voice. They must work as a team. Schooled and disciplined in good manners and to move in a compact group around the Master when not trailing, they are counted in couples. The pack belonging to the Fox Hill Beagles consists of 12 couples, 24 hounds.

The rabbits are timid by nature and easily frightened into flight. Nature has provided for them in that they give no scent unless they move. This is not true of fox and deer. Problems for the unmindful hound, protection for the bunny. A doe rabbit with litter is equally blessed for she also gives no scent.

With this in mind, we, as an amiable group, were led by the Master and Huntsman of the Fox Hill Beagles, Virginia Heyward. It is the Master who is responsible for the hunt and always anxious to improve the performance of the pack. Her business is casting the hounds to a probable spot where a line may be struck and the hounds give tongue and follow.

She is assisted by her able staff of three Whippers-in. (Please note, despite the name, at no time do they strike the animals.) It is the responsibility of the Whippers-in to assist the Huntsman in keeping the hounds together and keeping them on a line when one is found.



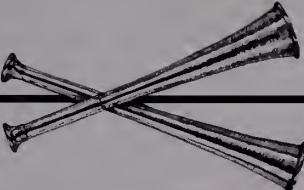
(Above) The Master and Huntsman of the Fox Hill Beagles is Virginia Heyward. (Right) The Master and Whippers-In keep the hounds together.



This is an intriguing process, for the rabbit is a wily character and his "line" is not easily followed. He is at home in swamps and swales, sassafras thickets, briar clumps, old orchards, weedy patches, line fences and open fields near wooded areas. Any place with a good growth of underbrush and vine is a likely home. Our native cottontail does not burrow. He usually nests above ground in land depressions. Their first swift flight is not sustained and they will often rely on hiding rather than running. They will, however, conveniently borrow a woodchuck's abandoned hole for safety. They will familiarize themselves with these hiding places in their territory, insisting that they have two exits, one to observe the approaching enemy and the other to insure a safe escape.

The first cry of the hounds indicates that the pack may have struck a line. It is the Master's responsibility to keep anxious bodies away from the line, for often the rabbit in his maneuverings will circle back again and again. Members of the field swiftly take to available high ground for a fuller glimpse of the hunt. The scattering is instantaneous, man's instinct being as quick as that of the rabbit and hound.

The activity found that day came not too far from an old hay barn down by a creek bed. The Master's horn was sounded and after a brief sprint in the wood, Melodie, a favorite in the pack, put the rabbit to ground and she busily tried to dig him out. Support for her efforts was given by her eager and somewhat obstreperous comrades. Alas, no luck, for as was mentioned earlier, our furry friend had



an alternate means of escape. The sense of excitement and glee was further enhanced by a nearby steer who dutifully answered the horn. It is this love of watching the hounds work and the unexpected pleasures of nature encountered along the way that have helped to perpetuate this ancient sport. Although this particular hunt did not produce an extended run, that form of excitement and vigorous exercise was not to be experienced until a later date when the crispness and chill of a twenty-eight degree afternoon quickened the pace of everyone involved.

The Fox Hill Beagles is a privately owned subscription pack kennelled at the farm of Major and Mrs. William M.F. Bayliss. The success of this pack and the pleasures it presents can be attributed to the long hours of devotion given by the Master and dedicated staff. Goochland County and

surrounding residents are grateful to the efforts of Mrs. Catherine Bayliss, wife of the Major, and Mrs. Frances Shields for initiating the idea and presenting it to their neighbors. The original pack was assembled by Mr. S.D. Drewry Deford who is noted for his considerable experience with beagle hounds. Semi-annually, they may take the hounds to the National Beagle Club Field Trails held just outside Aldie, Virginia. There the Master has the opportunity to see several packs hunting and to observe hounds for possible purchase.

Hunting begins in mid-October and continues most Sunday afternoons (holidays excepted) through the fall and winter, concluding in March when the baby bunnies are born. A hunting license is required by law. □



The Final Crystal

M O M E N T

A hunt's promise and pain, exhaustion and satisfaction, long waiting and intense concentration, fuse into one moment that becomes the emblem for all the hours that preceded it.

by Gerald Almy

The day is but a promise as I wrench my weary torso out of the tangled green blankets, pour smoking coffee down a dry throat, and methodically drape on the accoutrements of the deer-hunting ritual. The long johns, the cotton socks, the wool socks, the army fatigue pants, the red wool shirt, the black Icelandic sweater, the red down jacket, the brown gloves, the orange woolen hat.

It is the second day of deer season in Virginia. As yesterday and in seasons past, I will hunt the hollow down the trail behind our cedar cabin at the base of Powell Mountain. It is a gullet rich in deer, steep and forbidding in terrain, ignored by the masses of hunters stationed near the roads transecting the George Washington National Forest. The Massanutten Mountain Range juts sharp and defiant out of the fertile valley farmland, towering over the storied Shenandoah River as it winds like an ancient silver serpent towards Harper's Ferry and the Potomac.

The hollow is a deer highway. They travel nimble-footed down its sheer grey slopes in the evening, and, at the first pale flush of dawn, angle up to the safety of the Appalachian ridgelines. In the lowlands the deer dine by moonlight on corn, grasses, apples, the mast of fecund white oaks, and tender green shoots sprouting from the moist black soil. On the ridges they rest and watch from their daylight sanctuaries.

It is a pattern I have learned from three years of pursuing these deer. But learning their comings and goings does not ensure the success of the hunt. Again, as on Monday, the morning proves fruitless. A snort of lung-hot air through whiskered nostrils; stomping of hooved feet on the brown, frozen



Gerald Almy

"It is the immense challenge, the years of longing and effort that make this instant of culmination so sweet."

earth; and wild crashing up the mountain greets my best efforts to circumvent the deer and ambush them from above. "It is useless," I sigh in an interior monologue of self-pity. But this is only a ruse. I have no intention of giving up, of admitting defeat. I hunt the morning through, shivering in the cool dampness of dawn before the sun burns the white frost from the brown oak leaves.

Afternoon is the time. Yesterday proved the worth of this strategy. At three p.m. the squirrels that had been frolicking with carefree elan above my makeshift stand suddenly froze. Angrily they began barking, sprinkling a

cacophony of abuse on unseen intruders.

Had I moved? Blown my cover? No. I knew I hadn't. Sitting immobile, like a stone carving, on an uncomfortable log is an arduous task. You know if you're doing it right. And I was.

It had to be whitetails interrupting the merriment of the bushy-tailed rodents. And soon they were visible, angling in single file down the gravelly slope—a large doe, followed by two younger deer. Cautiously they stepped, peering this way and that.

But suspicion was in the large deer's eyes. She glanced constantly at my hunched form on the grey log. Her curiosity was strong. Down she came, followed like shadows by her smaller companions. Fifty, 40, then 30 feet from me. My spirit soared. Neck muscles stiffened painfully; hands fell asleep, pricked with millions of probing needles. But I didn't want to move.

The doe stared with eyes like lasers, burning through my motionless form. I rolled my pupils to glance at her trailing chums, and she bolted! Like ignited dynamite she exploded up the mountainside, followed closely by the smaller deer.

And no buck showed.

But now it is noon. Breaking my own injunction to see the day through without respite, I return to the cabin for lunch. The country ham sandwich, hot chicken broth and straw-colored Chablis perform miracles. I make my way back to the hollow where the three does materialized without their buck yesterday, where this morning the deer stomped heavy-footed up the brown ravine in a loud, branch-crashing panic.

It is early in the afternoon. They will



Lloyd Hill

descend before twilight, angling down in zig-zag fashion as they traverse the 60-degree slope. And he will be with them. I believe it. I must.

Further up the mountain I take a crude stand in the natural seat of a fallen, gnarled oak 30 yards above where the doe materialized the day before. The sky is bright and deep azure blue. It is cloudless and the cold breeze blows in my face from the mountain above.

Thoughts float randomly in and out of a tired head. The squirrels are below me today. I will have to spot the deer without advance warning. Did I shut off the stove burners in the cabin, crush the fire out of the cigar stub? Constant fear of burning down my wilderness retreat. Will the buck be with them today?

But the cold sun strangles all such idle impressions. The cold that is so brutal, so painful, yet so integral to the hunt. Pain and deer hunting. They go together like side-by-sides and ruffed grouse.

An image floods my mind as I watch from the time-twisted tree stump. A young professor stalks into a lecture hall at a large northern university. The course he teaches is on existentialism. Spare, lean, short blond hair. But it is his costume that stands out.

He is a deer hunter. Dressed in blaze-orange, snow still clinging to his boots from the morning's hunt, he hurries into the classroom five minutes late.

It is a transgression. To most of the class, the professor's "image" no doubt dropped drastically for wearing this garb. On a campus in the hinterlands such a slip might have been excusable. But he was on a campus known as one

of the most "citified" and liberal in the East, where over 80 percent of the students came from the metropolitan New York area. It took courage to reveal himself as a hunter in that milieu. Now to all the pretty young coeds he is a killer of poor, glass-eyed Bambis.

"I will have to spot the buck without advance warning."

But it is the words he spoke to us that day that drift through my mind as I gaze at the sumac scrub and scraggly Virginia pines perched precariously on the side of Powell Mountain, longing for my buck. "Pain is good," was the essence of his message, because it makes us *feel* our existence on a basic physical level. The implication was that the vast majority of people drift through life in a partially anesthetized state of semi-consciousness, buffered from a physical and conscious awareness of their self.

The idea was not a totally new one to me at the time. The same perception had been crystallized with stunning impact by Dostoevsky in his *Underground Man*—a remarkable character who carries to excess the quest of awareness through suffering. Even in the classic Greek tragedies it was through deep and awesome pain that protagonists soared to spiritual heights.

The professor's words stuck in my craw at the time. And now their verac-

ity seems redoubled as I shiver on my oaken stand. Though he did not allude to the hunting experience, his garb drew my thoughts there. Nowhere, it seemed, was the relationship of pain and the awareness of being alive more apparent than in big-game hunting.

The cold is most brutal. It pierces like a sharp scalpel. It is two hours, says the watch, that I have endured the cold. A day and a half, say my body and wilting spirit.

Fingers and toes cry out with the ache of numbness; face burns with cold as icy blasts of frigid air cascade down the mountain slope. The clothes, though I am dressed to the hilt, do not keep out the piercing squalls funneling down the sere grey ravine.

But the cold is only part of the pain. My back muscles stiffen and atrophy, demand to be exercised. But I do not give in. If I relent now, get up to stretch, renew the circulation of frost-curdled blood, I will risk blowing what may be the only chance for a fine buck for the day, perhaps the season.

But there is a deeper reason I do not move, do not walk around to relieve the torment of a frozen body. To do so would be to give up. The day is a battle, a duel between strength and weakness, endurance and surrender. I do not strive to impress anyone. I hunt alone. The stand hunt is an exercise in consciousness. We feel our existence on a gut level, sensing the pulse-beat of our own life blood. And we see the woods as non-hunters never can. The senses work at a pitch of heightened awareness that is impossible to reach when the body is moving. Aware of the forest and its inhabitants, we become part of the scene and gain the

“The struggle unfolds on such an intense level that victory will be mine at the end of the day if nary a buck is sighted.”

conscious predator's incisive vision of life and death.

And though my bones ache and sinuses burn as I watch a scarlet cardinal flit from bough to bough, it is the mental challenge of the watch that weighs heaviest. The mind cries out for diversion, movement, relief from the draining effort of studying the terrain. The struggle unfolds on such an intense level that victory will be mine at the end of the day if nary a buck is sighted. If I can endure the challenge of an extended watch, revel in the joy of confronting the elements in the most difficult manner possible—immobile, yet aware—the day will be a victory.

A patch of grey. Movement up the mountain. It is the deer. She is working alone today. I am convinced it is the large doe I saw yesterday—for no good reason. I do not raise my Marlin. Surely it is the doe. She works parallel to me, traversing the mountainside leisurely, browsing at 70 yards. Trees black her head as she nibbles, walks, nibbles, walks, ambles. And suddenly the deer is in a clear spot.

Horns! Shining antlers catch the glint of the sun. But *he* is moving now. It is a poor angle. I do not shoot. Surely, I hope and pray, he will angle down again and follow the faintly outlined trail bisecting the leaves below me.

With the sighting of the antlers my heart pounds furiously. Will he hear by labored breath, see my trembling fingers? No. He is around the knoll and out of sight.

Patience. The torment of the passage of time. Waiting. Seconds like hours, minutes like days.

Have I erred? Should I have shot quickly as he walked, at the poor



Lloyd Hill

angle? What if there is a hunter up the ravine and I missed my mark? What if the buck were wounded and lost in the encroaching darkness? Doubts. Always doubts and second guesses.

I am torn. The implacable activist in me wants to arise, bust out, and attempt to sneak around the knoll for a quick shot at the buck I know is there. But I know this is to err. It will cost me the buck. And it is to admit defeat. The temptation of a moving deer. Is it still too much for my stamina?

I remain. Thirty, then 40 minutes. I am wavering. I shall move. Stalk him. As I shift my weight to arise, there is a crackling. A twig breaks. Leaves rustle lightly. It is the buck! Just beyond the curve in the knoll, walking the trail directly below my stand. I sense it, though I cannot see the deer.

Again the adrenalin churns. And soon his rack appears around the slope. He is not a trophy, but a fine buck nonetheless. His face is handsome and

soft. He is 40 feet off, and he is mine. Brush and saplings block my shot momentarily. The gun is three-fourths raised, and the deer knows nothing. He feeds and browses, casually takes a step toward me. Thirty feet. He knows nothing.

For three years I have trekked these mountains, known the thick welling in the throat of frustration, the burning red face of defeat. And the final crystal moment of the kill will now flood my senses. It is a consummation of volcanic proportions. It is the immense challenge, the years of longing and effort that make this instant of culmination so sweet. Days and weeks of work; the frozen limbs, burning muscles, mental anguish. Never is victory as sweet as when we sweat and suffer, delighting in the struggle more than the outcome. For without the pain, it is simply a matter of pulling the trigger.

And as I gaze at the buck, waiting for him to clear the brush, for his chest to fill my iron sight, I see his death. And I affirm it. There will be no tears of regret. There cannot be, no matter how hard it is to hold them back.

I see my own death in the liquid brown eyes of the buck. I am bound to the buck with the bond of mortality. Hunter and hunted united with the bond of death. In confronting the death of this deer, I acknowledge my own vulnerability and affirm death as the element which creates life's richness. Day without night would not exist. Life without the impending hand of death reaching out to grasp us would be meaningless.

The buck has cleared the sapling now. He is 20 feet away. The sight is on his chest. Fighting the trembling, I squeeze off. □

Cut the Cost of Duck Hunting

Don't want to spend a lot of money to pursue your sport?
Try one of the Game Commission's fee waterfowl areas.

by Sarah Bartenstein

Waterfowl hunting can be downright expensive. Once you buy a federal duck stamp, hunting license, blind license or pay a guide fee and possibly buy a boat and motor, buy and rig decoys, not to mention training and keeping a dog you have shelled out a tidy sum. This doesn't include other costs such as guns and ammunition, clothing, calls and other trappings of the sport. Unless you are one of those fortunates who live near good duck hunting, you can throw in the cost of travel, meals and lodging, too.

One way to cut the cost of duck hunting is to be lucky in the annual drawing for waterfowl blinds on one of the Commission's waterfowl hunting areas. These include Hog Island in Surry County, and Pocahontas, Barbour's Hill and Trojan Wildlife Management Areas on Back Bay in the City of Virginia Beach.

All you have to do is submit an application and your check. If your application is one of those chosen in a computerized drawing this fall, you can take advantage of an economical "package deal."

Actually, only Hog Island, Barbour's Hill and Pocahontas Wildlife Management Areas are involved in the drawing. The Trojan Wildlife Management Area is available on a first-come first-served basis daily. Only blinds are furnished; hunters must provide their own boats and decoys. The fee is \$5 daily.

The fee for hunting Hog Island and Barbour's Hill is \$15 a day per blind. Blinds, decoys and boats are furnished. At Pocahontas hunters enjoy a southern style, old fashioned duck hunt, complete with guide, boat, motor and decoys. The cost of this deluxe hunt is \$75 per blind. Up to three hunters may share a blind.

Although there are numerous blinds available, only five are hunted on any given day. The blinds are rotated to keep hunting pressure down and the quality of the hunt up.

The Game Commission met August 26 and set the waterfowl seasons for the 1983-84 season. Applications for the blinds will be available soon at the Game Division office in the Commission's Richmond headquarters. The drawing this year is open only to licensed hunters holding the current (1984) hunting license.

In addition to the applications, a set of instructions is furnished for each of the waterfowl management areas. These instructions explain hunting procedures and rules unique to each area. They also indicate the dates upon which hunts will be conducted at each area. Hog Island, for example, is hunted four days weekly with no hunting on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays. The other areas are hunted every day except Sunday.

Every effort is made to ensure that all applicants have an equal opportunity to win a day in a blind. This year, in order to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to win, only one application for each wildlife management area may be submitted by each licensed hunter. In fact, in order to compete, the applicant must put his 1984 hunting license number on the application. If the hunter wins a blind, that hunting license number will appear on his permit and on the records at the wildlife management area. When the hunter arrives at the wildlife management area his hunting license number will be verified against his permit before he is assigned a blind.

This new measure was necessary to even the odds. In the past, some applicants submitted applications for their

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Fill in all information requested, including signature at bottom of this side.
2. Send check with application. Do not bend or fold card in mailing.
3. Make check or money order payable to **TREASURER OF VIRGINIA** in the amount shown on the attached information sheet for Pocahontas. **DO NOT SEND CASH.**
4. Be sure that your new hunting license will be checked for the upcoming season and must match the listed number on the date of the hunt.
5. Mail application with P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, Virginia 23238.

I hereby certify that I'

Application For Hunting on Pocahontas Waterfowl Management Area (WMA-1)

Name _____	Last _____	Date _____
Complete Address:	First _____	Initial _____
Street or Box Number _____	Address _____	
City _____	Zip _____	Telephone Number _____
State _____	Area Code _____	Telephone Number _____

Current Hunting License Number:
The license year began July 1.

Check enclosed
 Money order enclosed
DO NOT SEND CASH

(Application void if payment not enclosed.)

SEE OTHER SIDE FOR INSTRUCTIONS (READ CAREFULLY)

Choice of dates:

1st _____

2nd _____

3rd _____

If above dates are unavailable:
____ Reserve earliest open date or
____ Cancel my application and return check

Amount of check or money order \$ _____

OFFICE USE ONLY



Virginia Game Commission photos

(Top) This year, the application is separate from the information sheet for each area. (Left) Every effort is being made to ensure that you have a fair chance to be one of the hunters in a Game Commission waterfowl blind this season.

wives, infant children, employees and even their dogs. This year, the entire drawing is conducted by computer. This electronic "watch dog" is on constant alert for duplicates or erroneous license numbers and it will quickly identify and reject them.

No matter how many duplicates are sent in or when they are sent, the computer will find them. If a person lets someone else use his hunting license number he stands the chance of having both his and his buddy's applications rejected.

The winning permits are not transferrable. If someone buys his wife a hunting license and she wins the blind, it will be she who goes hunting. The winner may bring two guest along, but the winner must be present.

To recap, in order to apply you must have your new 1984 hunting license and you must submit your check or money order along with the application. The deposit required for Pocahontas is \$25, the balance (\$50) is payable to the guide the day of the hunt. Only \$15 is required to accompany an application for blinds at Hog Island or Barbour's Hill. Refunds will be made to those applicants who are not selected.

Commission Game Division Chief Jack Raybourne is determined to see that everyone gets a fair shake this year. Incomplete or otherwise unacceptable applications will be returned immediately. If the application is submitted early enough the applicant may still have time to correct and return it by the deadline.

Applications will be available on or after September 10, 1983. Applications may be picked up in person, or by mail at the Commission's Headquarters at P.O. Box 11104, 4010 West Broad Street, Richmond, Virginia 23230-1104, Attention: Game Division. Separate applications and information sheets are available for each of the three areas and hunters may submit one application for each area. The completed application and the required fee must be returned to the above address *no later than 5:00 p.m., October 11, 1983*, to be eligible for this year's drawing. No applications will be accepted after the deadline. Checks, incidentally, must be made payable to the Treasurer of Virginia.

When filling in an application, be sure to completely answer all questions. If the application is not complete it will be returned. On each application the applicant may select three dates of his choice. He should also indicate if he is willing to accept the earliest date available if his preferred dates are taken or he may elect to cancel if the desired dates are unavailable. Raybourne urges hunters to list their preferred dates, and to indicate (in the space provided on the application) whether they are willing to accept the first available date if their first three choices are not available. If you fail to mark this on the application, you will be eliminated from the drawing once your three chosen dates have been filled.

Once an application is received, the computer checks it against all others to ensure it is not a duplicate. If it is a duplicate, the application is rejected. When all applications have been received, and after the October 11 cut-off date,

the computer will generate a random mix of numbers. This number list will be matched to the sequence numbers assigned each application. The hunter with the first application matching the random number will get his first choice of dates. The second also gets his choice and so on until all of the open dates are filled.

Successful applicants will receive their permits in the mail. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified and their deposits returned. A computer-generated standby list will be maintained. If anyone returns his permit, a standby will be given an opportunity to use it.

All of the wildlife management areas are located in excellent waterfowl habitat. The Pocahontas Area on Back Bay is in one of the finest duck hunting areas in the east. The guided hunts available here are worth much more than the \$75 fee which may be split among three hunters. These experienced waterfowl guides provide their own motors, boats and decoys as well as their time. The fee and any tips they may receive is their compensation for their time as well as for the depreciation and wear on their equipment. Normally the guides also provide retrievers, so hunters should leave their dogs at home.

At Barbour's Hill hunters are provided boats, blinds and decoys, but they are on their own otherwise. Of course, they must hunt from specified blinds. At a designated time each morning, hunters are met at the Little Island Recreation Area at Sandbridge by a Commission representative in the only vehicle authorized to pass through the federally-protected Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge area. Hunters must meet this vehicle or they cannot hunt that day. Because there is very little room in the vehicle, hunters cannot bring dogs to Barbour's Hill. This area, incidentally, located on the east side of Back Bay, is capable of providing excellent shooting.

At Back Bay hunters are likely to encounter a wide variety of ducks and some snow geese. Canada geese are not normally plentiful here. Because of the nearby Back Bay National Waterfowl Refuge, there are waterfowl flying somewhere within sight all day. All of this adds up to an exciting day.

Hog Island, located on the James River adjacent to the VEPICO nuclear power plant in Surry County, offers good shooting for many species of ducks and some Canada geese in a marshland habitat. Hunters are provided a blind, decoys and a boat. Retrievers are welcome there. Hog Island offers a rewarding experience for the waterfowler, with ducks and geese being in view throughout the day. The observant sportsman may also capture a glimpse of an endangered bald eagle here.

These wildlife management areas were purchased with funds provided by sportsmen. Unfortunately, it is not possible to provide every hunter with quality hunting at these facilities without some form of regulation. Our new computerized drawing is the way in which we hope to give as many sportsmen as possible a chance to compete fairly for one of these exciting and rewarding hunting experiences. □

Virginia Wildlife Federation to Hold 18th Awards Banquet

The 18th annual awards banquet of the Virginia Wildlife Federation is slated for October 15 at the Hilton Inn in Virginia Beach.

Each year the Federation honors outstanding contributions to the field of conservation in 13 categories from the Governor's Award for the state conservationist of the year, to conservation educator to legislative conservationist.

Tickets for the 6:00 p.m. banquet are \$17.00 each and must be purchased in advance. The deadline for ticket orders is October 7; send your order to Virginia Wildlife Federation, 4602 D West Grove Court, Virginia Beach 23455.

For hotel reservations, write directly to the Hilton Inn, 8th and Oceanfront, Virginia Beach, Virginia 23451. □

To Field Dress a Deer

by Bob Gooch

Instructions on field dressing deer often advise the reader to slit the skin by making a cut around the anus and working up the belly to the edge of the rib cavity. Untold numbers of deer have been successfully field dressed in this manner, and I have no real quarrel with it.

But I downed my first deer back in the days when whitetails were just beginning their modern comeback, and both deer and deer hunters were scarce. Help and advice were not readily available. My knowledge of field dressing was more or less limited to the understanding that if my family was to enjoy some prime venison the innards should come out of the animal immediately. Following logic mostly, I assume, I turned my prize on its back, braced it in that position between my knees and facing the animal's rear, I punctured the skin in the apex of the V formed by the rib cavity. From that point I worked backwards (the reverse of the often recommended way) to cut around the anus.

Years later I still follow that procedure, and looking at it objectively now, I still favor it.

Slitting the belly is best done with the animal on its back, and by straddling the upper part of the body, where there is good support, and pressing the knees against its sides it is easier to hold

the animal in that position. Probably equally as important is that in this position the animal's ribs hold the skin away from the internal organs which tend to drop when the animal is flat on its back. This leaves some working space between the skin of the belly and the inside organs, and there is less risk of piercing the viscera, a mistake that can taint the meat. Finally, since the belly skin is sloping downward from the rib cavity to the anus, the point of the skinning knife slides against the skin as you work toward the rear. This also reduces the risk of piercing the viscera.

From this point the procedure is the same regardless of whether you make the slit in the belly from the anus or from the rib cavity. Simply roll the animal on its side, sever the windpipe and esophagus and pull out the innards. Save the heart and liver. □



Survival Tips

When you take to the field this fall, don't leave your common sense at home! Taking a few precautions now will prevent serious trouble later.

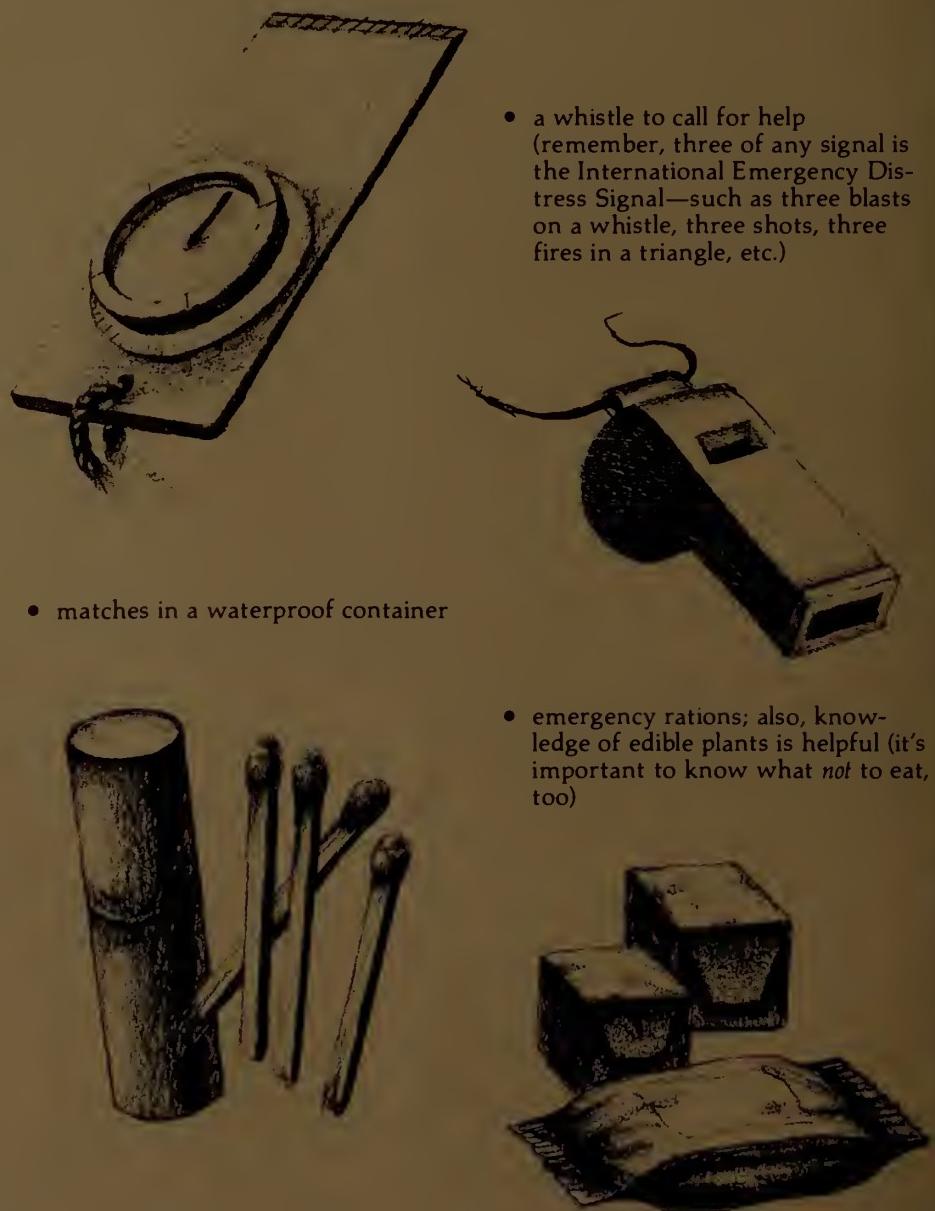
Find a good book on survival and first aid and study it—*before* you go on a hunting trip. Or better yet, enroll in a course such as the first aid course offered by the Red Cross, or the hunter education course offered by the Game Commission. (For more information on hunter education, contact your local game warden or the agency headquarters at P.O. Box 11104, 4010 West Broad Street, Richmond, Virginia 23230-1104, and address your inquiry to the safety officer. The telephone number is 804/257-1000; again, ask for the safety officer.)

In the meantime, here are some basic things to remember:

- Tell someone where you are going and when you expect to return
- If you do get lost, don't panic—if you do, you can be your own worst enemy
- Fishermen get lost, too; if you move, go downstream, don't cross any ridges, use the sun as a guide, and watch for landmarks

Some small but essential items could save your life:

- compass and topo map of the area (maps are available from the Virginia Division of Mineral Resources, Charlottesville, Virginia 22903)



- a whistle to call for help (remember, three of any signal is the International Emergency Distress Signal—such as three blasts on a whistle, three shots, three fires in a triangle, etc.)

- matches in a waterproof container

- emergency rations; also, knowledge of edible plants is helpful (it's important to know what *not* to eat, too)

- a length of rope



Safe hunting is not only a matter of careful gun handling; it also involves knowing how to survive beyond the reaches of civilization. Good luck. □

Save Your Game Law Digest

Sportsmen are being asked to practice a special kind of conservation: hold onto your game law digest! The pocket-sized *Summary of Virginia Game Laws* published by the Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries will not be reprinted next year. In a budget-cutting measure, officials at the Commission designed the pamphlet to be used for this season and next. Although a larger than usual number were printed this year, this action is expected to save the agency money through decreased staff time spent on compilation of the booklet, as well as through a smaller overall printing bill than would have been paid for two separate publications. Hunters are reminded to keep their current copies of the digest for use next year, since the supply will have dwindled considerably by then.

The same applies to the summary of fishing regulations published by the Commission.

Supplements to the game law digest include a summary of migratory gamebird regulations and one for waterfowl regulations. Since seasons and bag limits for these species are set later in the year than are other regulations, they are not included in the regular digest. The migratory gamebird regulations

Summary of Virginia Game Laws 1983 and 1984 Seasons



are outlined in this issue of *Virginia Wildlife*; waterfowl regulations are set by the Commission in August (after this issue goes to press). That supplement, and all other summaries, are available from the Education Division, Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries, Box 11104, Richmond, Virginia 23230-1104. □

The Twenty Gauge or the Twelve?

by Bob Gooch

One sure way to get an interesting confab going among shotgunners is to begin a comparison between the 12- and 20-gauges, the most popular shotguns in America today. I shoot both, but I favor the little 20 for field work because it is light and easier to swing quickly on the jumpy, often wild-flushing birds that challenge the modern bird hunter. The lighter gun and loads are also less tiring during a long day of walking.

Still, there are places for both guns in the modern hunting picture.

Some hunters feel their chances of scoring with the 12-gauge are better because it shoots a wider pattern than the 20. This is wrong. The diameters of the patterns of the two gauges are roughly the same, but that of the 20 is thinner because the smaller shell holds less shot. The denser, not wider, pattern of the 12 gives its fan some advantage over the 20-gauge shooter, but it is slight. The modern shotgun shell with its wadless crimp has done much to improve the patterns of all loads. The more even distribution of shot offsets some of the thinness in the 20-gauge pattern.

The range of the 12 is greater than that of the 20, but primarily because the denser pattern holds together longer with the additional shot. The

20-gauge pattern thins out more quickly and is thus less effective.

The hunter who understands his gun and its load will experience no trouble with the little 20-gauge in most of his field shooting. □

About the Authors

Gerald Almy is well-known to readers of *Virginia Wildlife*; the Woodstock resident is also a contributor to *Field and Stream*, *Outdoor Life*, *Gray's Sporting Journal* and other publications. Lt. Herb Foster is the law enforcement division's assistant supervisor for the educational activities of the game wardens from the Richmond area to southside Virginia. Bob Gooch of Troy is a widely-read outdoor columnist; he contributes to *Virginia Wildlife* and other magazines regularly; squirrels are among his favorite subjects. Bill Cochran's byline is familiar to readers of the Roanoke *Times-World News*, for which he is the outdoor columnist. Jack Randolph is a former Commissioner and was recently appointed assistant executive director of the agency. He often writes for *Virginia Wildlife* and other publications. Mary Taylor is a freelance writer living in Henrico County, "on its border with Goochland," the site of her story on beagling. Sarah Bartenstein is managing editor of *Virginia Wildlife*. Lt. John Heslep works out of the Roanoke area supervising the education work of the game warden force in that region. □



Big Game Trophy Contest Set

Dates for this year's Big Game Trophy Contest are September 23 and 24 for the western region, October 8th for the eastern region and the state-wide contest. The western regional will be held in Harrisonburg, the eastern and state in Newport News. For more information, contact Charles Rogers, 638 Creasey Ave., Newport News, Virginia 23601. □

How To Clean a Firearm

by Lt. John Heslep

Proper care and cleaning of your firearms can insure years of shooting enjoyment. You should clean your guns after each outing.

First, lay all equipment in an area with enough room to work. Always point the muzzle in a safe direction, open the action, and make sure the gun is unloaded.

Clean the bore of the gun from the breech end whenever possible. Some firearms require cleaning from the muzzle. To properly clean, begin by using a bristle brush and powder solvent. After using the brush, clean with a patch. Never try to remove the powder residue with oil. This will cause a gummy substance to accumulate.

After thoroughly cleaning the gun, use a cotton patch to apply a light coat of oil. Complete the cleaning process by wiping the exterior of the gun with a lightly oiled rag.

This simple cleaning procedure will keep your firearm in proper working condition. □



(Top) First, find an area with adequate space in which to assemble all your equipment and work. (Left) Although you should clean from the breech end if possible, some firearms can only be cleaned from the muzzle end.

(Left) Use a bristle brush and powder solvent. (Far left) Finish up by wiping the exterior with a lightly oiled rag.

September 24, 1983

National Hunting & Fishing Day

A Day For a Lifetime

